

Local Authority Housing Inspection Report

March 2007



# Inspection Report

**Rossendale Borough Council**

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For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ

Tel: 020 7828 1212 Fax: 020 7976 6187 Textphone (minicom): 020 7630 0421

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## Local Authority Housing Inspections

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively and delivers high-quality local services for the public.

Within the Audit Commission, the Housing Inspectorate inspects and monitors the performance of a number of bodies and services. These include local authority housing departments, local authorities administering Supporting People programmes, arms length management organisations and housing associations. Our key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) set out the main issues which we consider when forming our judgements on the quality of services. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing).

This inspection has been carried out by the Housing Inspectorate using powers under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. In broad terms, these principles look to minimise the burden of regulation while maximising its impact. To meet these principles this inspection:

- is proportionate to risk and the performance of the Council;
- judges the quality of the service for service users and the value for money of the service;
- promotes further improvements in the service; and
- has cost no more than is necessary to safeguard the public interest.

## Summary

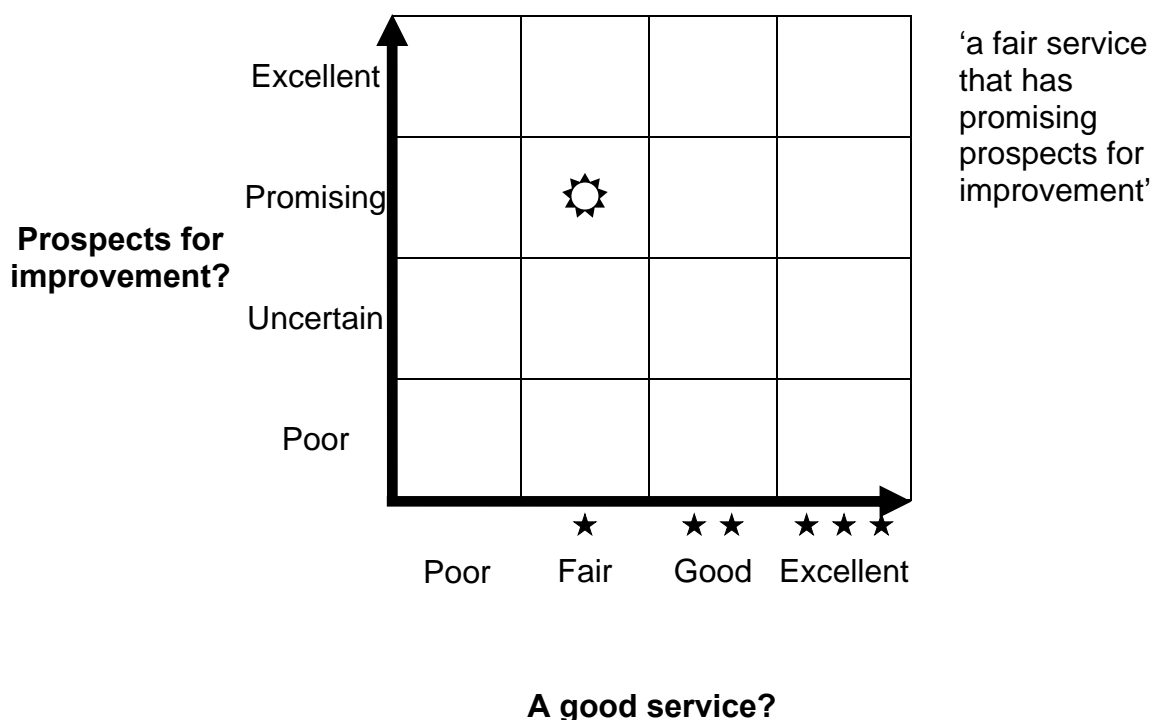
- 1 The borough of Rossendale, in south east Lancashire, covers 137 square kilometres, made up of valleys cutting through fells and moors. The population of the borough is 65,000 with 2.5 per cent from ethnic minority backgrounds. The main communities are based in the towns of Rawtenstall, Bacup, Whitworth and Haslingden.
- 2 The Council does not have its own stock of homes having transferred these to a Registered Social Landlord (RSL) in 2006. The inspection focused on the Council's strategic approach to housing including its role in enabling new housing and how housing services assist in making the best use of existing housing. The Strategic Housing Service is responsible for; housing strategy and enabling the provision of affordable housing; homelessness and housing needs; and private sector housing.
- 3 Strategic housing services provided by Rossendale Borough Council are assessed as being 'fair' one-star service with promising prospects for improvement.
- 4 The principle challenges to the service are in improving the outcomes from the base of research and strategy that has already been established. Planning mechanisms have only recently been used to secure affordable housing and under the present planning restrictions demand for affordable housing will not be met. Vulnerable homeless households are placed in temporary accommodation of variable quality, often outside of the borough.
- 5 The Council's approach to diversity needs further development. Presently it does not have an understanding of the diversity of the users of its strategic housing service or of the housing needs of the BME community. Disabled people have long waits for disabled facilities grants and other services to those living in difficult housing conditions such as equity release loans are not well advertised.
- 6 A fit for purpose housing strategy is in place which was developed through effective consultation. There is an increased focus on homelessness prevention and several initiatives with private sector landlords has improved access to privately rented property. Homelessness and housing advice services are based at one centrally located office and are becoming more accessible.
- 7 Value for money at a service level has not been demonstrated and further evaluation is required to ensure that the cost and quality of services are in balance.

- 8 The prospects for improvement are promising. The Council has a recent track record in improving some services and there are robust plans in place that cover key areas for improvement. There is strong leadership of the service and a performance management framework in place. There are still some barriers to improvement including inconsistency in some aspects of performance management, target setting is modest and underdeveloped, some key targets are not achieved and absenteeism and staff turnover rates for the Council are high, but falling.

## Scoring the service

- 9 We have assessed Rossendale Borough Council as providing a 'fair', one-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

**Figure 1 Scoring chart<sup>1</sup>**



Source: Audit Commission

- 10 The service is a fair, one-star service because:
- there is a single point of contact for most council services;
  - public areas in council buildings are suitable for, and accessible to, people with disabilities;
  - information is provided in a range of formats to meet customers' needs;

<sup>1</sup> The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

## 8 Inspection Report | Scoring the service

- consultation with all relevant stakeholders on specific initiatives, such as homelessness;
- partnership working with a series of agencies is well developed; and
- the Council has an understanding of housing need (excluding black and minority ethnic) and private sector stock condition in the area.

### 11 There are a series of weaknesses, including:

- there is no emergency temporary accommodation in the borough;
- customer complaints and feedback are not comprehensively analysed to improve customer access and focus;
- an underdeveloped approach to diversity: no analysis has been made of which sections of the community are accessing services or of housing need amongst the black and minority ethnic community;
- extensive waiting lists for disabled facilities grants;
- PSA 7 targets (vulnerable people living in decent homes) will not be met; and
- the supply of affordable housing at its present pace will not meet demand.

### 12 The service has promising prospects for improvement because:

- there have been a series of improvements to services which will be noticed by service users;
- performance has improved across a number of indicators;
- a value for money approach is developing;
- there is a clear commitment from senior officers and councillors to improve services;
- performance management systems are good; and
- the Council is learning from other providers and show a willingness to change.

### 13 Areas for improvement include:

- complaints and satisfaction levels are not gathered effectively or used as opportunities for learning;
- target setting is modest and underdeveloped, some key targets are not achieved;
- identified demand for affordable housing will not be met within present policies; and
- absenteeism and staff turnover rates for the Council are high, but falling.



## Recommendations

- 14 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the Council. In addition, we identify the approximate costs<sup>2</sup> and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context the inspection team recommends that the Council should do the following.

### **Recommendation**

*R1 Improve the strategic approach to meeting housing need by:*

- *reviewing planning policy to ensure it reflects the need to maximise affordable housing in line with needs information;*
- *improving access to good quality temporary accommodation for homeless people;*
- *reviewing how different affordable housing tenures should be best used to address need; and*
- *carrying out a comprehensive review of lettings policy linked to the development of choice-based lettings.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- maximising delivery of affordable housing in tenures that most effectively meet needs;
- developing lettings policy which best meets needs and customer aspirations.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by December 2007.

### **Recommendation**

*R2 Improve intervention to make best use of existing homes by:*

- *put a plan in place to reduce delays in delivering Disabled Facilities Grants and waiting times for Discretionary Repair Grants by June 2007; and*
- *achieve a reduction in delays in delivering Disabled Facilities Grants and waiting times for Discretionary Repair Grants.*

<sup>2</sup> Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- increased customer satisfaction; and
- people being able to live comfortably in their own home.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by March 2008.

**Recommendation**

*R3 Reduce the number of empty homes:*

- *developing a comprehensive strategy for dealing with empty homes and ensure robust action to address this issue.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- reducing disrepair in private sector housing;
- increased customer satisfaction; and
- more empty homes brought back into use.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by June 2007.

**Recommendation**

*R4 Strengthen the approach to meeting the housing needs of all sections of the community by:*

- *ensuring that all strategic housing services have a comprehensive user profile;*
- *produce a more detailed housing strategy for people of black and minority ethnic origin;*
- *have a plan in place to meet government targets on vulnerable people in decent homes;*
- *ensuring a comprehensive approach to diversity including robust customer profiling, assessment of disability needs in affordable housing and active engagement of new migrant communities; and*
- *publicise services and assess the effectiveness of services preventing homelessness.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- housing services better meet the needs of all sections of the community; and
- increased customer satisfaction.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by June 2007.

**Recommendation**

*R5 Ensure a comprehensive approach to performance management and value for money by:*

- *developing comprehensive performance monitoring reports for all services;*
- *developing a clear value for money strategy for housing services and engaging in cost benchmarking to inform this work; and*
- *developing effective feedback mechanisms for all service users.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved performance management; and
- a stronger approach to ensuring value for money.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by June 2007.

# Report

## Context

### The locality

- 15 The borough of Rossendale, in south east Lancashire, covers 137 square kilometres, made up of valleys cutting through fells and moors. The population of the borough is 65,000 with 2.5 per cent from ethnic minority backgrounds. The main communities are based in the towns of Rawtenstall, Bacup, Whitworth and Haslingden. Textiles and shoe manufacturing form the economic history of the borough but since these have declined - partly due to increased imports - the borough has struggled to define a new economic identity. Rossendale has good transport links, with easy access to Manchester and the industrial towns in the north east of the county.
- 16 The Strategic Housing Service is responsible for; housing strategy and enabling the provision of affordable housing; homelessness and housing needs; and private sector housing. Over the past year, the Council has made a significant contribution to the development of the local economy in the less affluent east of the borough through the Futures Business Park at Bacup. Council staff have relocated to this site from Rawtenstall and other offices. Customer access to services has improved by the introduction of a one-stop-shop at Rawtenstall. The Council has also launched a customer charter and made improvements to its website.
- 17 Economic activity in Rossendale is nearly 20 per cent lower than the national average of 74.7 per cent (ONS December 2004). Households wholly retired from work account for almost a fifth of all households. Permanently sick or disabled households account for just 4.8 per cent of all households, which is lower than the national average of 5.5 per cent. Unemployment in Rossendale at 3.2 per cent is significantly lower than nationally at 4.7 per cent.
- 18 In November 2005, the Council secured a 'yes' vote for the transfer of its housing stock to Greenvale homes. The transfer took place in April 2006 and will enable a substantial programme of repairs and improvements to tenants' homes.
- 19 Rossendale has a total of 29,574 residential properties of which there are 28,068 households residing within these (HMR and Strategy Property Database as of October 2004). The housing tenure split is skewed towards owner occupation, with 19,494 (72 per cent) of households owning their own home, compared to 2,768 (10 per cent) private rented sector, 750 (3 per cent) RSL rented and 4,099 (15 per cent) Council rented. There are only three houses in multiple occupations, two of which fall within the licensing regime and are presently licensed.

- 20 Unusually, tenure trends in the borough have bucked national trends. In the period 1991 and 2001 owner occupation fell slightly from 73.8 per cent of all households to 71.9 per cent, whilst the national trend has been upwards. Over the same time period, the privately rented sector has more than doubled from 4.2 per cent to 10.2 per cent. Nationally, the privately rented sector has also grown but not to the same extent.
- 21 Demand for affordable housing is growing in the area. A recent housing needs assessment found that to meet affordable housing demand 347 new units need to be created by 2010. Over the period 1998 to 2006 Rossendale have lost 839 social rented houses, mainly through right to buy, whilst during the same period only 74 new social housing units were built.
- 22 Three districts with Rossendale are Housing Market Renewal areas. Just over 5,500 dwellings in Bacup, Stacksteads and Britannia come under 'Elevates' intervention programme. An Area Development Framework has been developed which will set the broad context for the regeneration and spatial development of the area.
- 23 The 3 of Rossendale's 14 wards to fall under Elevates housing market renewal initiative, have seen over £4.7 million of HMR resources invested in the area and has achieved:
- the refurbishment of over 270 properties; and
  - the demolition of 29 low demand properties.

This will act as a catalyst for change and create a healthier and more vibrant housing market.

## **The Council**

- 24 Rossendale Borough Council has 36 councillors, employs approximately 196 staff and manages a gross revenue budget of £9.8 million for 2005/06. The Council is Conservative controlled holding 24 seats out of 36 in total. The decision-making structure has been confirmed as a Leader and Cabinet model after a period piloting this arrangement. In the past year, the Council has also completed an organisational review with the appointment of new key officers including a Deputy Chief Executive.

- 25 In January 2004, the Audit Commission published a Comprehensive Performance Assessment category for Rossendale Borough Council. This assessment categorised the Council as 'poor'. However, a Progress Assessment Report in February 2006 described the Council as 'progressing well'. And that:

*'Political and officer leadership is much improved and the Council is now characterised by a more positive approach. Public confidence in the Council is improving, albeit from a low base.'*

The same assessment also commented:

*'The Master Planning exercise for Stacksteads and Bacup is resulting in visible improvements to private sector housing.'*

- 26 Since the CPA assessment in 2004, the Council has worked with the local strategic partnership to develop a community strategy and delivery plan, launched in June 2005, covering eight strategic themes.

### **The Council's strategic housing service**

- 27 The inspection looked at the following service areas: access and customer care, diversity, strategy and enabling, homelessness and housing need, private sector housing strategy and enabling, value for money and prospects for improvement.

## How good is the service?

### What has the service aimed to achieve?

28 The Council and its partners, have developed, their vision for the borough in 'Rossendale Alive'. 'Rossendale Alive' clearly sets out an agenda to improve the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the area and deliver improvements that will be noticed by service users and residents.

29 The Housing Strategy has a clear and ambitious vision:

*'By 2020 Rossendale will offer a choice of well maintained, affordable housing for all residents.'*

The Strategy sets a series of objectives, rather than priorities for 2005/08. The objectives are as follows.

- Affordability – *'Improve choice and access to quality affordable housing to create balanced and sustainable communities.'*
- Decent homes – *'Improve and enhance the quality of homes throughout all tenures and ... meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard by 2010.'*
- Renewal – *'Improve the quality of homes and communities in areas showing signs of decline.'*
- Supporting Particular Needs – *'Address particular housing needs of Rossendale's vulnerable households... to help them exercise a choice in their housing options.'*
- Consultation – *'Improve the communication and involvement of our stakeholders and residents.'*
- Knowledge – *'Base our Housing Strategy on robust and manageable data, consultation and knowledge.'*

30 The 2006/07 revenue budget for the strategic housing service inclusive of on costs and accommodation charges is £438,912 and the Housing Capital Programme managed by the team amounts to just over £3.1 million.

31 Closely linked to the Community Strategy is the Council's mission of '8x8x2008'. This mission is to have 8 out of 10 customers satisfied with their services and 8 out of 10 Key Performance Indicators (KPI) in the top quartile of councils by 2008. Rossendale have eight corporate objectives, of which one directly relates to strategic housing services: creating affordable housing and improving the general quality of social housing and owner-occupied homes.

- 32 Three of the eight objectives are internally-focused.
- Improvement – the continuous provision of high quality public services built upon the foundation of finance, risk, performance, procurement and human resources management
  - Customers – being responsive and proactive to meet the needs of all our customers.
  - Partnerships – increasing our capacity to deliver through effective partnerships.

## Is the service meeting the needs of the local community and users?

### Access and customer care

- 33 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in the Council's approach to access and customer care. An emphasis has been placed on shaping access to council services around the preferences of customers, but a number of weaknesses remain. Customers preferred means of contact and hours of contact have been researched and have influenced service delivery. A new one-stop-shop has been opened and benefit enquires can be made to an extended hours telephone service. However, the recently produced suite of leaflets have not benefited from customer editing. The website has been enhanced, but still has a limited range of interactive services. A number of key services have been outsourced, but the means of assessing the quality of these services needs strengthening. Service standards are not comprehensive, there is no emergency homeless accommodation in the borough and the lack of publicity of some services has depressed their uptake. There are extensive waiting lists for adaptations and applicants are not kept up-to-date on the progress of their application
- 34 An effective strategy for customer care has been adopted across all council services. The strategy is fit for purpose and dovetails with other council strategies and objectives. The strategy has drawn on a number of sources including public consultation, best practice and other reports on Council services. A series of stretching service standards are set such as 80 per cent of all enquires being answered at first point of query, the telephone being answered within 20 seconds and all services being e-enabled. A series of proxy targets to indicate quality of service are set, such as all frontline staff having undergone mandatory customer care training and fewer than two per cent of complaints being justified. However, stretching service standards do not extend to all services, for example, the disabled facilities grant service. Applicants for grants face lengthy waits and are not updated on the progress of their application. Without comprehensively applied standards the Council will not achieve the 'across the board' improvements it is aiming for.



- 35** Reception facilities are pleasant, welcoming and staffed by well trained staff. After an initial assessment of their needs customers are directed to specialist advisers and 'surgeries' are regularly conducted by advice agencies such as CAB. Although the office is well appointed, interviewing facilities for initial enquires are small and not especially private. Private interview rooms are available for more detailed interviews. Effective enquiry facilities improve access to services.
- 36** Access to services has been generally shaped around customer preferences. Customers were researched about how they would like to access services and what opening hours they would like. Following the research the one-stop-shop was established and opening hours of 8.45am to 5.15pm agreed. The Council consider there is insufficient demand to warrant the expense of an extended hours service. However, an emergency out-of-hours service is available. Appointments for home visits are also available but not well publicised. This is an effective means to provide services in a manner and at a time which meets the needs of service users.
- 37** The Council creates a reasonable first impression from its newsletters and website. The website is informative, relatively easy to use but has only a limited number of interactive services. A series of hyper links are provided to other relevant sites and a number of forms can be downloaded; but generally applications for services cannot be made on line. Payments can be made on line but it is not clear how to do this. Council newsletters are an attractive mix of hard and soft news effectively presented to encourage readers. Websites and newsletters are an effective means of spreading information about services.
- 38** Several council services are not effectively promoted and advertised. The one-stop-shop does not display information about, for example, landlord accreditation and the take up of services such as equity release loans is limited. For example only three equity release loans have been arranged for the over sixty age group, despite the area having a high potential take up with an ageing population and high proportion of older properties. More encouragingly take up of equity release loans in younger age groups is greater, with 17 loans arranged. The private landlords' accreditation scheme has only attracted a small proportion of landlords, despite offering a variety of free services such as property survey and advice on housing law. Effective promotion of services will improve take up.
- 39** Leaflets advertising council services are of a generally reasonable standard and informative. A new range of suited leaflets on council services have recently been launched, as well as a suite of jointly produced leaflets by Greenvale Homes and the Council explaining about the Housing Options (Homelessness) service. The leaflets are attractive and informative but have not been edited by services users. Some leaflets' use of English could be plainer, and jargon is used too frequently. Leaflets are an effective means to inform people about services and what they can expect from the service.

40 Customer feedback for most services is gathered and acted upon. Users of frontline services are regularly canvassed on their opinions and there are several examples of where their suggestions have been acted upon, for example, the displaying of LanguageLine posters in reception areas. Other service specific surveys are completed but the use of closed questions on questionnaires and the omission of key questions such as 'How long did you have to wait for the work to be completed?' diminishes the quality of the survey. Effectively gathering and acting upon service users' opinions is an effective way of improving services.

41 The use of service level agreements to monitor the quality of services is underdeveloped. A series of service level agreements have been negotiated with providers of outsourced services and advice agencies. However, there are a number of weaknesses with the agreements:

- there are no diversity considerations in the service level agreement governing the housing options service delivered by Greenvale Homes;
- agreements with advice agencies are so new the services governed by them have yet to be assessed;
- qualitative aspects of service are not recorded; and
- the training of staff delivering outsourced services is not monitored.

Ineffective service level agreements will result in poor quality services which service users will hold the Council responsible for.

42 There is no accommodation for homeless families in the borough. Following the closure of a homeless families unit in 2000, homeless households have to be placed in temporary accommodation in Burnley. There are no facilities near the temporary accommodation for interviewing and homeless households have to travel back into Rossendale for interviews. This creates an extra burden on homeless households at an already difficult time.

43 At a corporate level the Council welcomes complaints and uses them as an opportunity for learning. A complaints and compliments feedback procedure - 'On the record' - has been agreed and the progress of complaints against service standards is closely monitored by corporate services. Complaints are used for learning, and in addition, general comments from residents are acted upon and reported back to residents through 'What You Said.... What We did', section in the quarterly council newsletter. Complaints and suggestions are an effective means of involving customers in services.

44 At a service specific level the complaints service is less developed. The complaints procedure is not well advertised on leaflets and some homeless young people met during the inspection felt they could not complain for fear of losing their accommodation. A well advertised and robust complaints procedure is an effective means of protecting vulnerable people.

## Diversity

- 45 The Council's approach to diversity shows more weaknesses than strengths. The Council does not meet the Commission for Racial Equality code of practice on rented housing. Waiting times for disabled adaptations are excessive and the Council does not have a comprehensive understanding of where adapted properties are. Diversity training is mandatory for all staff although staff met during the inspection could not recall how the training changed their working practices. The Council has self-assessed itself as being at Level 2 of the Equality Standard and has completed impact assessments for a number of service areas. Most publications and the website are available in different formats and there are a number of services to support vulnerable people living in their own home. Public offices are DDA compliant.
- 46 At a corporate level the Council takes diversity issues seriously and has appropriately resourced the area. An equalities group has been recently established, chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive and a lead councillor for equality has been appointed. It has self-assessed itself as being at Level 2 of the Equality Standard with a target to achieve level 3 in 2008. It has completed equality impact assessments for all policies and procedures. Companies seeking contracts with the Council must have diversity strategies before being considered for council contracts. Diversity is an integral part of the Council's business planning and a detailed action plan covering several areas such as community cohesion is in place to improve the Council's performance in the area up to 2008. The clear statement from the Council on its intent to embrace diversity will help create a culture of diversity.
- 47 The Council are unsure of the take up of services by diverse communities. The ethnicity of service users is recorded but there has been no examination of service take up against the specific communities profile in the borough. The Housing Options Team has a database system that records information on ethnicity, vulnerability and the geographical origin of the applicant. However, the data base is not extensively populated and it is unclear how this information is to be used. The Council are presently unsure if diverse communities are accessing their services.
- 48 The Council are presently unaware of the housing needs of diverse communities and does not meet the Commission for Racial Equality code of practice on rented housing. Rossendale do not have a BME housing strategy and the present strategy does not incorporate an up-to-date assessment of the needs and requirements of diverse needs within the community. It has yet to meet its statutory obligation to investigate the housing needs of travellers and there are no traveller sites in the borough. A contribution has been made to fund a Lancashire-wide study of travellers housing needs in area and research into the BME communities need is to commence shortly. Nevertheless, the Council is outside of its statutory obligations as well as good practice in meeting the housing needs of diverse sections of the community.

- 49 Staff have mandatory diversity training and councillors are trained on their legal obligations in relation to diversity. However, the impact of training for staff is unclear. Staff met during the inspection could not recall much about the training nor identify how it has affected the manner in which they provide services. Furthermore, the training is not comprehensive, for example staff have not been trained in transgender or age-related issues. This raises questions about the effectiveness of the training and about how the impact of the training has been evaluated.
- 50 The Council has a good understanding of customers and disabled customers preferred means of contact with the Council. A disabled customers' focus group provided a perspective on accessing services by people with a disability and the easy access to the one-stop-shop reflects this. Information from Lancashire County Council and the East Lancashire Partnership shows the most common community languages in Rossendale are Urdu and Bengali and most publicity material is available in these languages as well as other formats such as Braille. This is an effective means of delivering services and will help improve customer satisfaction levels.
- 51 The disabled adaptations service is poor. Waiting times are excessive, over two years in several cases and applicants are not kept apprised on the progress of their application. The Council are unsure of where adapted properties are and have not developed any effective procurement processes. However, urgent cases are dealt with quickly and additional funding for the service has been secured from other sources. Presently disabled people are waiting for long periods for necessary adaptations to their homes.
- 52 Access to services by people with a disability is generally good. Buildings used by the public are DDA compliant. Offices visited by the public were found to be well equipped for people with disabilities and fitted with: hearing loops, low counter for wheelchair access, automatic doors, signing, languageline and minicom. The website conforms to level Double-A of the WWW Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and has a number of useful functions such as increasing font size and colours combined in manner to make text more prominent for people with sight impairment. This is an effective means of improving access to services for people with a disability.

**53** Some provision has been made to develop services to reflect the changing population profile of the borough. Census details show the borough has an ageing population and one in four households contains someone with a mobility impairment and a rapidly increasing BME population. To meet this changing need new services and forums have been developed:

- availability of equity release loans;
- increased resources for disabled adaptations;
- community cohesion panel; and
- development of a Home Improvement Agency.

Tailoring services broadly to meet the boroughs population profile is an effective way to meet need and make the Council more relevant to people's needs and aspirations.

**54** The diversity of the workforce broadly reflects that of the community it serves. Currently BME and disabled members of the workforce constitute 2.7 per cent and 4.3 per cent of the total workforce respectively, against a target of 3 per cent and 5.0 per cent respectively. The gender balance between staff is broadly equal. The Council are introducing a series of initiative to make working for the Council more attractive such as flexible working practices and a reward scheme.

### **Strategy and enabling**

**55** The Council's approach to strategy and enabling is a balance of strengths and weaknesses. A series of fit for purpose strategies have been adopted which dovetail with wider Council and regional strategies. A new strategy unit has been created and a good understanding of demand for housing and the condition of housing in the area has been established. However, key objectives around the provision of affordable homes and government targets around the percentage of vulnerable people in decent homes will not be reached. A black and minority housing strategy has not been agreed and restrictions in current planning arrangements to meet housing need have to be addressed.

**56** Following the transfer of the Council's housing stock appropriate resources have been put into the Council's strategic housing and enabling role. A 'Housing Market Renewal and Strategy Unit' has been set up with overall responsibility for the strategic development of the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder, strategic analysis and management of housing and the delivery and monitoring of the Housing Strategy. Additionally, a separate post of Head of Economic Regeneration and Strategic Housing has been created to allow greater focus on Strategic Housing at the senior management level. The Council's strategic housing role is vital to developing new affordable housing in the borough and improving the housing conditions of those living in the private sector.

- 57 A series of strategies to deliver the Council's and regional housing objectives have been developed. The strategies and priorities dovetail with other broader Council and regional strategies, for example, the Housing Strategy refers to the Community Strategy and Corporate improvement plan. The strategy also refers to broader regional objectives including the Lancashire Supporting People strategy and the Regional Housing Strategy. Joining up strategies in this manner ensures resources are directed into priority areas.
- A Housing Strategy was agreed in 2005, declared fit for purpose by GONW and is supported by a series of other strategies such as for affordable homes. It has an ambitious vision: *'By 2020 Rossendale will offer a choice of well maintained, affordable housing for all residents.'*
- 58 It is easy to access the Housing Strategy. The strategy is available in hard copy, on a CD or the Council's website. The CD and internet versions have hyperlinks which direct the reader to relevant supplementary documents. A four-page summary version is available and, on request, other formats such as Braille and tape and community languages.
- 59 The Housing Strategy was drawn from a number of sources and informed by research. The strategy was widely consulted on and innovative and 'easy to be consulted' tactics were used such as a stall at Bacup carnival. A housing needs and market assessment survey was completed in 2004 and incorporated housing market movement, earnings, travel to work areas and wider labour market patterns. The last private sector stock condition survey was completed in 2001. However, an East Lancashire stock condition survey was completed by Elevate in 2004 and this has been used to inform the strategy. A strategy grounded in established facts and comments from stakeholders will deliver outcomes relevant to people living in the area.
- 60 The demand for affordable housing cannot be met within the current planning framework. The housing needs survey identified a need for 347 affordable homes in Rossendale up to 2010 or around 70 homes per year. This has been incorporated into an affordable housing strategy for the period 2006 to 2008, whose targets for completion of affordable homes reflects the survey. However, the Joint Lancashire Structure Plan 2001 to 2016 prepared by Lancashire County Council identifies a target of 1,920 new dwellings required in Rossendale over the duration of the plan. There are already planning permissions granted and actual completion of 2,384 new residential properties in the borough leaving an oversupply of 465. Therefore, even if no new residential planning permissions are given during the period to 2016, Rossendale still has outstanding residential planning permissions in excess of that permitted in the Joint Lancashire Structure Plan. Furthermore, the borough's interim housing supply of 2005 aims to limit residential development to the areas covered by the Rawtenstall Town Centre Area Action Plan and the Bacup, Stacksteads and Britannia Area Action Plan. These areas were not identified in the housing needs strategy as areas with high demand for affordable housing. Presently, the Council has little prospect in meeting demand for affordable housing in the areas where people have indicated they wish to live.



- 61 The Council is looking at reviewing its interim housing supply policy and introducing an interim affordable housing supply policy by January 2007. The aim will be to address the competing objectives of restricting supply, but providing for affordable housing. In addition, a North West Regional Spatial Strategy, prepared by the North West Regional Assembly, is emerging. This will set a revised housing supply figure for the plan period 2003 to 2021. Depending on the target set, this may resolve the current problem caused by the conflicting objectives of affordable provision and restricted supply.
- 62 The Council has been slow in taking advantage of planning laws to improve access to affordable housing. The Council has only recently agreed a section 106<sup>3</sup> policy, where any development sites which are over 10 units or 0.5ha the Council will request that 30 per cent of the total units developed be affordable. Presently the Council has only secured three affordable housing units from section 106 agreements. In an area of rapidly rising land prices using planning law is one of the most effective means of building affordable housing.
- 63 The performance of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) has recently been awarded Government Office North West rating of 'good'. The Housing Theme Group under the LSP, will monitor the performance of the Housing Strategy over the next few years until a full review is carried out in 2008. The Housing Theme Group incorporates all stakeholders has taken part in several initiatives such as improving nominations from Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in the borough and has a series of objectives linked to the Housing Strategy. The group has its own performance management report which uses a traffic light system to indicate progress against objectives The group has created the Rossendale Youth Housing and Support Group which through the 'm3 project' has provided accommodation and support is a supported lodgings format to homeless young people. Involving all stakeholders in this manner improves the standard and access to housing in the wider region.
- 64 Rossendale works effectively with its partners and particularly its principle partner, Greenvale Homes. Appropriate agreements with Greenvale Homes regarding allocations policies, development of choice-based lettings and future social housing development to secure effective working arrangements were reached when planning the stock transfer. Greenvale are positive about the Council's process and framework for consultation on the strategy and its engagement in other relevant partnerships (such as the LSP and its sub-groups). Having positive working relationships with partners who are confident about its work means that Rossendale is more likely to maintain successful partnerships that help it to achieve its strategic objectives.

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<sup>3</sup> Section 106 agreements - section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

## Homelessness and housing need

- 65 The homelessness service provided by the Council has more weaknesses than strengths. Homelessness and repeat homelessness is generally falling in the borough and the use of bed and breakfast accommodation is restricted to emergencies. Preventative measures such as rent bonds and a mediation service have been developed. Homeless initiatives have been supported and good links have been fostered with other agencies working in the field such as Connexions and Stonham. However, there is no emergency homeless accommodation in the borough and many initiatives and new working structures are so new it is not possible to determine any outcomes. Move on accommodation is difficult to secure and temporary accommodation is not of a high standard. Homeless applicants are not informed of their right to a review at an appropriate stage and mechanisms have only just been developed which could be improved for service users to feedback on the service or become involved in its delivery. Homelessness prevention and advice services are not adequately publicised.
- 66 Homelessness and repeat homelessness is falling in the borough, although it is difficult to identify the main drivers of this. Homelessness presentations show significant reductions over the last two years and are around a quarter lower than last year. Similarly, repeat homelessness is not a significant problem with no cases in 2004/05 and only two cases in 2005/06. A homelessness experience has been found to have long lasting negative effects, and particularly so on children. It is much preferable that homelessness is avoided in the first place.
- 67 The main aims of the Homelessness Review and Strategy have yet to be fully realised. The Strategy's main principles and actions are to:
- prevent homelessness by developing better advice services;
  - minimise homelessness by facilitating multi-agency working and developing joint protocols; and
  - provide a safety net by developing emergency and permanent accommodation.

It is only recently that better advice services and multi-agency working has been put into place and little progress has been made on developing emergency and permanent accommodation. The strategy is presently under review by an external consultant and it is hoped that a new strategy will be produced early in the year. Encouragingly the authority has a developing infrastructure and protocols in place to support the strategy. An effective strategy and action plan to implement it will lead to an improvement in services for the homeless.

- 68 In March 2002, the Government set a target that, by March 2004, no homeless family with children should have to live in a B&B hotel, except in an emergency, and even then for no more than six weeks. The Council no longer uses bed and breakfast accommodation except in emergencies and then only for short stays.



- 69 The homelessness service has been contracted out to Greenvale homes, but has a number of weaknesses. Greenvale have set up a 'Housing Options Team' to deal with all homelessness presentations and liaise with other agencies. Greenvale work well with other agencies and are eager to improve the service. However, there is not yet a complete and up-to-date set of procedures for housing options team staff to follow. The lack of a clear set of procedures means that staff may not provide a consistent service to customers and, without adequate guidance, may fail to carry out important stages of homelessness assessments.
- 70 Frontline staff at both Rossendale's one-stop-shop and Greenvale Homes Neighbourhood Office have received basic training in providing initial housing advice. This ensures that potentially homeless households are given appropriate advice at the initial stage and are not deterred from making a homeless application (frontline staff are not involved in making decisions on homelessness). This initial interview is crucial in determining how quickly homeless households reach the support they need.
- 71 Access to the homelessness service is mixed. A referral process has been agreed with advice agencies to the Housing Options Team and the one-stop-shop also provides an advice and referral service. However, e-access to the service would be improved by details of the service appearing on Greenvale Homes website as well as the Council's. Furthermore homelessness prevention and advice services are not adequately publicised. Although service leaflets are made available in the Council's one-stop-shop, the service is not otherwise publicised. Failure to provide wide publicity for the service means that some households in housing need may not know about the services provided and may not get appropriate and timely advice which would prevent them becoming homeless.
- 72 An effective out-of-hours service is provided. Free phone out-of-hours numbers are well publicised and all customers contacting the Housing Options Team are provided with the number as well as other agencies with whom the service works. A reality check of the service showed calls to be returned immediately by a sympathetic and helpful officer. The clear publicity ensures that access to the service is easy for service users.
- 73 Service users have only recently been informed of their right to review and of the appeals procedure when decision letters were issued. This means service users were not receiving adequate information at the right time about what to do if they disagreed with a decision. This was addressed whilst we were on-site and the relevant leaflet explaining the process is being issued with the decision letter. Alongside this the homelessness review and appeals process has recently been improved and reviewed in line with good practice. The revisions have included appropriate division of decision-making responsibilities between the Council and Greenvale Homes. This will help avoid expensive and time consuming legal interventions.

74 Preventative measures are being developed for all those potentially facing homelessness. A series of initiatives which will help prevent homelessness have recently commenced, including:

- mediation visits to help people remain in their homes;
- award of priority status on the housing waiting list to prevent homelessness;
- encouragement of local landlords to become 'accredited';
- bond scheme to increase availability of privately rented accommodation; and
- visits to local schools to talk about the availability of accommodation in the area.

Rossendale have yet to make any assessment of the effectiveness of these measures.

75 Clear service standards have been agreed for the housing options service. The service standards accompany clear and informative leaflets that explain the service and signpost readers to other agencies who may be able to help them. The service standards include: conduct of interviews, response times to initial enquiries and homelessness decisions and contact arrangements for households placed in temporary accommodation. Clear service standards allow service users to make an informed assessment of the service they have received.

76 Monitoring arrangements are not yet in place to cover all the Housing Options Team service standards. Performance against key indicators such as decision times is reported but this is not the case for all the standards. This means that service users and the Council cannot assess service performance and Greenvale cannot clearly demonstrate the extent to which the service is achieving its stated objectives. Presently, Rossendale cannot comprehensively gauge the effectiveness of the service.

77 Service users are not involved in the delivery of the service. Housing options customer information has been developed in conjunction with some tenants of Greenvale (who act as an editorial group for Greenvale customer information and publications). However, customers who have recently used the homelessness and housing advice service have not been involved in this. This means that Greenvale is missing a valuable opportunity to seek feedback from customers who have actually used the service and who would know from first hand experience which information was useful and what else they would have found useful.

78 Service users have only recently been able to easily feedback on homelessness and housing advice services. Customer surveys are sent to applicants at various stages to obtain their views on the applications process and temporary accommodation. However, the surveys used to obtain feedback use closed questions, limiting the information which will be obtained from them. This is a significant issue as service users met during the inspection mentioned they were too afraid to complaining about their temporary accommodation for fear of losing it. As satisfaction surveys have only recently been introduced, there is insufficient information to draw any conclusions about the satisfaction of service users.

- 79** Support is provided to households in temporary accommodation. Housing Options Team staff visit households following their placement in temporary accommodation and agree support plans with them. Support plans are developed by the accommodation support provider or by Housing Options team staff. Providing appropriate support and advice to the homeless during a period of instability reduces the chances of repeat homelessness.
- 80** Rossendale have worked effectively with partner agencies to provide services for the homeless. This has included:
- working with two other local authority's to joint fund three specialist support staff;
  - new/amended protocols for housing 16 and 17 year olds;
  - single route of referral for young homelessness established;
  - provision of accommodation and office space managed by voluntary agency; and
  - funding for a 'sanctuary' based scheme for those experiencing domestic violence.

This is will help reduce the number of repeat homelessness presentations.

- 81** There is limited liaison with either RSLs or private landlords to prevent homelessness. Contact tends to be on a case by case basis and there has been little work by the Council or Greenvale Homes to initiate discussions with landlords about effective methods to minimise homelessness. There are plans to investigate options for the lease of private sector properties to provide more suitable and local temporary accommodation for homeless households, but this is still at the preliminary stage. Providing a greater variety of options would assist in preventing homelessness and a greater range of choices to service users.
- 82** Good relationships have been established with RSLs for nominations to empty RSL property. RSLs complete an electronic form detailing available properties which the Council can the use to identify applicants, including homeless applicants. Effective communications between the Council and RSLs for nominations reduces void relet times and helps those in identified housing need.
- 83** Temporary accommodation for homeless households in Rossendale is inadequate. Since the closure of a homeless families unit in 2000, homeless households have to be placed in temporary accommodation in Burnley. Additionally there are no facilities near the temporary accommodation for interviewing and homeless households have to travel back into Rossendale. A bid to Department of Communities and Local Government is being worked up under the Hostels Fund but this is still at the formative stage. This creates an extra burden on homeless households at an already difficult time.

- 84 There are inadequate arrangements for move-on accommodation in the borough. This is partly due to the lack of affordable accommodation in the area but also due to the fact that a clear strategy for the provision of move-on accommodation has not been developed. A lack of appropriate move-on accommodation may compromise the effectiveness of short-term temporary accommodation which helps some users move gradually on to greater independence.
- 85 The Council does not have sufficient information about the costs of the homelessness service. While costs of the overall homelessness and housing advice service are known, through the agency fee paid to Greenvale Homes, more detailed costs such as costs per case are not known. Furthermore, no analysis has been made around the cost and quality of the temporary accommodation provided. The Council has not benchmarked the costs of its provision with other authorities to evaluate whether or not it could realistically reduce the cost of the service. Without this information, the Council are unsure if they are spending their money in an effective manner.
- 86 Limited use is made of information why people use the housing options service to effectively to guide prevention strategies. For example, housing advice provided is recorded but not analysed to identify the most common types of advice and queries (as is done with homelessness applications). Carrying out this analysis would assist in identifying the kind of advice most needed and help the service to direct resources to its most effective preventative measures.
- 87 Training for staff in the Housing Options Team has been limited in recent years. Whilst there are examples of training linked to current issues and new good practice guidance, staff are not adequately equipped to provide a high quality advice service. However, staff have recently attended training regarding the recent prevention strategy checklist and regional champions have also visited to discuss possible preventative measures, such as spend to save initiatives. Nevertheless, many of Greenvale's actions are planned rather than implemented at present.

### **Private sector housing strategy and enabling**

- 88 There are more weaknesses than strengths in services to people living in the private sector. The Council has a good understanding of the condition of private sector properties in the borough and the demand for affordable housing. However, a series of initiatives to improve conditions in the private sector have only achieved limited success and links with other stakeholders in the area have only recently been developed. Progress to meet the demand for affordable housing in the borough and to achieve Public Service Agreement Target 7 (70 per cent of vulnerable people in decent homes by 2007) is uncertain. The rate of empty homes in the borough is above national averages but targets to reduce the number are modest.

- 89 The Council's Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy and Policy is comprehensive and sets a series of objectives to improve conditions in the private sector. The strategy was approved in March 2003 and amended April 2005 and has ten objectives which dovetail with wider corporate objectives. The objectives cover such issues as working with Elevate to achieve joint objectives and improve conditions in the private sector. The strategy also saw the change from grants to equity release loans. The strategy has had mixed success such as the successful implementation of Elevate schemes but has failed to address inadequacies in such services as disabled adaptations.
- 90 Rossendale has a good understanding of the condition and occupation levels of private sector properties in their borough. A private sector stock condition survey was completed in 2001 and supplemented by an East Lancashire stock condition survey in 2004 which surveyed a thousand households and incorporated the Housing Health and Safety Rating System<sup>4</sup>. The most recent survey estimated the number of unfit properties in the private sector in Rossendale to be 2,723 (11.6 per cent of all dwellings) the main reasons were due to disrepair, poor thermal comfort and a lack of modern facilities. To bring all non-decent housing up to the decent homes standard it is estimated that it will cost £43.14 million, or £5,142 per dwelling. Using the Housing Market Renewal strategy property database system, it is estimated Rossendale has approximately 1,600 properties vacant, representing about 5.5 per cent of the total stock compared to the national average of 3.3 per cent. Having a detailed understanding of the condition of and occupancy rates of property allows effective planning and the appropriate allocation of resources.
- 91 Staff have been trained in the provisions of the Housing Act 2004. Staff have received training on key aspects of the act such as the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) and the licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation<sup>5</sup> (HMOs). The HHSRS has been used in the private landlord accreditation scheme; the borough only has three HMOs, two of which qualify for licensing and are presently licensed.

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<sup>4</sup> Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) is the new risk assessment procedure for residential properties. It replaced the Housing Fitness Regime from the 6 April 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Houses in multiple occupation are defined in the Housing Act 2004. These are properties of three storeys or more, occupied by five persons or more, and occupied by persons living in two or more single households.

- 92 The Council cannot effectively monitor the number of vulnerable households in decent homes in the private sector, as it is required to do to deliver its Public Service Agreement 7 (PSA7)<sup>6</sup> target. The Government has set out in PSA 7 targets to increase the estimated national levels of vulnerable people living in decent homes from 57 per cent to 65 per cent by 2006 and to 70 per cent by 2010. Presently, the Council only has an estimate of the number of vulnerable in non-decent homes from information drawn from a number of sources. Without comprehensive information, the Council are unsure if they have achieved the target.
- 93 The present empty homes strategy was agreed in 2003 and is currently under review. The present strategy needs updating to include the provisions of the 2004 Housing Act, such as Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) or documents such as IDeA's '*A cure for empty homes*'. The draft strategy incorporates both and contains an objective that by 2020 the level of voids in the borough will reflect the North West average. This will mean a reduction in the number of empty properties by 290; this is a slower rate of reduction than the present annual rate of reduction of 30. Furthermore, it does not prioritise areas with high number of empties or those which have been vacant for over six months. The draft strategy fails to target resources into areas of greatest need to or to combat properties which are causing greatest nuisance.
- 94 The Council's response to empty homes is inconsistent. The Council has not adopted a proactive approach and officers tend to react to complaints from the public about empty properties rather than dealing with them systematically on a worst first basis. It has not yet considered how it will use EDMOs and has not agreed a schedule of work. However, the Council has recently produced a leaflet advising residents what they should do about empty homes and has agreed to charge full council tax on empty homes. A consistent and co-ordinated approach to the problem will reduce the number of empty homes more effectively.
- 95 The Council has positioned itself to act early should private sector housing markets decline. A housing markets early warning system has been adopted. Through MAP INFO (the Council's Geographical Information System), the housing market data collected has provided a comprehensive profile of Rossendale's housing markets enabling analysis at both a borough-wide and sub-borough level. The system has a series of 'alarms' set to alert staff should an area show signs of instability. This will allow the Council to intervene at an early stage when the chances of reversing decline are much better.

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<sup>6</sup> One of the Communities and Local Government's performance targets for the Spending Review Period 2005 to 2008. There are eight PSA's from the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister plus PSA 9 on Race Equality and Cohesion (formerly PSA 7 for the Home Office) and PSA 10 on Gender Equality (formerly PSA 9 for Department for Trade and Industry). PSA7 states that '*by 2010, bring all social housing into a decent condition with most of this improvement taking place in deprived areas, and for vulnerable households in the private sector, including families with children, increase the proportion who live in homes that are in decent condition*'.



**96** Rossendale has made a series of attempts to improve standards in the private sector. This has included:

- an accredited landlord scheme. Incentives are provided for landlords to join the scheme and improve their stock. Becoming accredited gives landlords, amongst other things, access to free property surveys and advice on landlord obligations and benefit law. The HHSRS is used as the benchmark to judge properties against;
- a rent bond scheme. Private landlords taking people in housing need are offered a council funded bond against rent loss and damage to property;
- landlords forum. A combined authority service that has recently been reinvigorated. Landlords spoken to during the inspection found the forum informative and helpful. Meetings are held quarterly with around 30 to 40 landlords attending; and
- Rossendale have taken a lead in co-ordinating a sub-regional response to the provisions of Housing Act 2004, through a common property standard and a consistent approach to the HHSRS.

In an area of declining affordable housing provision and increasing property prices, privately rented properties are an increasingly important resource in meeting housing need.

**97** There have been improvements in SAP<sup>7</sup> ratings in the borough. The Government's Fuel Poverty Strategy has a target to end fuel poverty for vulnerable households by 2010. Around a third of vulnerable households are fuel poor. SAP ratings have improved from around 49 in 2000, to 60.3 in 2004, to 67 in 2005/06. A series of initiatives to reduce fuel poverty are underway such as:

- an agreement has been reached with Viscount Insulations and N-power to carry out £100,000 of insulation works to the properties in the Pathfinder area; and
- 'Warm 4 Less' scheme with a registered installer, aimed at owners who do not qualify under the Warm Front scheme and accesses funding through the Energy Efficiency Commitment scheme (EEC) provided by energy suppliers.

However, take up and advertising of the service is limited and the Council propose to a new round of advertising in the New Year. Poorly heated homes have an effect on the occupant's health and inefficient heating systems undermines the Council's attempt to reach carbon emission targets.

**98** Rossendale have been innovative in funding improvement works, using the provisions of the Regulatory Reform Order 2002. Minor grants to improve properties have been replaced by an equity release scheme. The scheme has had limited take up-to-date, but a re-launch is planned for the New Year when it is hope take up will increase. This is an imaginative way to fund improvements and an effective use of resources.

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<sup>7</sup> SAP rating - Standard Assessment Procedure, the Government's recommended system for home energy rating. It is based on the calculated annual energy cost for space and water heating. The higher the number, the better the energy efficiency of the dwelling.

- 99 An effective homecare and repair service is in place. Through a partnership with St Vincent's Housing Association, the Council has provided assistance to 360 elderly households through the Handyperson project which provides small repairs for older people. The Council supports the service with an annual grant (£44,000 in 2006/07) and additional funding is received from Supporting People, PCT and Social Services. The service fits well with areas demographic profile and high levels of owner occupation of older deteriorating stock.

### **Disabled adaptations**

- 100 The Council provides a poor disabled adaptations service. Waiting lists for adaptations are excessive and applicants are not kept informed of the progress of their application. The borough lacks a detailed knowledge of the location of adapted properties and there are no service level agreements between the various agencies providing adaptations. Additional resources are now helping reduce waiting times and urgent requests are responded to quickly. There are high levels of customer satisfaction and applicants can have a choice of contractor and a modest choice in fixtures and fittings.
- 101 There are lengthy waiting lists for adaptations in the borough. Several applicants have been waiting over 18 months for none urgent adaptations. Waiting times for Occupational Therapist (OT) assessments average around 38 weeks, which includes assessments for even minor aids and adaptations. Timescales for the overall completion of grants are not being reported through the Council's performance management framework and therefore councillors are not fully aware of performance in this area. Lengthy waiting times means residents cannot live safely and independently in their own homes.
- 102 The service lacks a customer focus. The service does not have a comprehensive service level agreement in place governing how the adaptations service will be delivered. Applicants are not kept informed about the progress of their applications nor given an indication of how long they may have to wait. There is a limited choice of fixture and fittings, with an option for the applicant to purchase their own. Overall this is poor customer care and leaves vulnerable people unsure of how long they may have to wait and what level of service to expect.
- 103 Service users' satisfaction levels with the service are not effectively gathered. Satisfaction levels are only gathered after the work has been completed. An applicant's opinions of service at this stage of the process will inevitably be influenced by the recent installation of the adaptation, and unsurprisingly surveys show high levels of satisfaction, with 95.3 per cent of respondents either very satisfied or satisfied with the service provided. High levels of satisfaction do not always correlate with high quality services and the timing of the survey will affect its findings.
- 104 The Council works effectively with other agencies to deal with urgent requests quickly. Urgent requests for adaptations such as to free hospital beds are dealt with quickly, in one example, a major adaptation was completed within three weeks. An adaptations priority is determined by OTs and according to agreed medical criteria. Working with other agencies can free scarce resources such as hospital beds and address acute need.



**105** The Council are aware of the lengthy adaptations waiting list and some provision has been made with partner agencies to reduce it. This includes:

- the Home Improvement agency (HIA) has acted upon 'Minor adaptations without delay' and with the applicants approval will fit minor adaptations;
- the HIA has also used OTs from charitable agencies to enable assessments to be carried out more promptly than would otherwise have been the case; and
- Greenvale Homes has appointed an OT and funded adaptation work to some of its own stock. Adaptations have also been installed alongside Greenvale's decent homes standards improvement work.

The input of additional resources for adaptation works outside of the Council programme means that resources are released for adaptations in the private sector. Although this has yet to impact on waiting lists, in the longer-term it should lead to reductions in waiting times.

**106** A comprehensive data base of adapted properties in the borough has yet to be established. Although there is a reasonable understanding of adapted socially rented properties in the area there are a number of gaps in knowledge about private sector properties. The Council intends to update the information; but presently the lack of a comprehensive data base means adaptations may not be used as effectively as in an area where the Council has a greater understanding of adapted stock in its borough.

**107** There is little inter agency planning on future demand for adaptations or sharing of information on adapted properties. There has been no assessment by agencies of the likely demand for adaptations in the coming years. Information on private sector adapted properties in the borough is not shared with other agencies and a common register of households seeking adapted properties has not been established. Agencies such as the HIA are unaware of the Council's involvement with forums such as East Lancashire Physical Disability Partnership Board. This is not a good use of resources and the Council is not preparing for the increase in demand an area with an ageing population is likely to witness.

**108** The Council has increased funding for the service for this year from a variety of sources. Additional help has recently arrived from other agencies such as the HIA and Greenvale Homes as well as a successful bid for £75,000 of additional DFG resources from GONW which was matched with £50,000 of the Council's own resources. In 2005/06 the actual spend was £363,000 and delivered 75 grants.

**Table 1 Disabled facilities grants allocation**

| Year    | Private sector housing |             | Council housing <sup>8</sup> |             |
|---------|------------------------|-------------|------------------------------|-------------|
|         | Number of homes        | Expenditure | Number of homes              | Expenditure |
| 2003/04 | 64                     | £279,919    | 47                           | £168,341    |
| 2004/05 | 60                     | £300,000    | 50                           | £200,000    |
| 2005/06 | 60                     | £300,000    | 50                           | £200,000    |

Source: Housing Strategy 2005 to 2008

- 109** Value for money with the adaptations service has not been effectively established. Contracts for adaptation works are usually let via competitive tender on a job by job basis. Discussions on delivering adaptations through a partnership arrangements and the letting of block contracts are only at the initial stage and there is no timetable for their completion. The cost of works has not been formally benchmarked outside of the borough. The Council are unsure if disabled facilities grants are securing value for money.

### Is the service delivering value for money?

- 110** The Council's approach to value for money is a mixture of strengths and weaknesses. At a corporate level the Council has placed a clear emphasis on securing value for money and has taken a series of significant steps, such as the outsourcing of services to achieve this. At a strategic housing service level there has been less of an emphasis on value for money; there has been little benchmarking of the cost and quality of services, section 106 agreements have only recently been used to gain affordable housing units and contracting arrangements for installing disabled adaptations are old fashioned.
- 111** The Council has scored two out of four in its use of resources assessment. In the recent 'Value for Money' assessment undertaken by the Audit Commission, it was recognised that:

*'Members and senior managers have identified and pursued opportunities to reduce costs and improve value for money. There is evidence that improvement planning is now leading to service improvement and better VFM in some priority areas.'*

However, less emphasis has been placed on securing value for money in strategic housing services.

<sup>8</sup> Now transferred to Greenvale Homes

- 112** The Council has a medium-term financial strategy which is a financial expression of the corporate plan. This sets out the Council's Financial Framework for the next three years linking to and supporting the corporate priorities for the next three years. It has ensured that the 2006/07 budget setting process has been fully integrated with corporate priorities.
- 113** An emphasis has been placed on delivering services by different means and the transfer of council assets to newly created trusts. This has included the outsourcing of some services such as benefits assessment and warden call services to a private sector company; the creation of a leisure trust to manage and develop leisure facilities and creating an RSL to take ownership of and manage the Council's housing stock: Greenvale Homes. Residents were extensively consulted on the moves and the performance of the outsourced services is closely monitored.
- 114** The outsourcing has resulted in significant savings for the Council. This includes:
- the cost of delivering benefit services is approximately £180,000 less than the previous direct costs;
  - freeing up of Council accommodation and the release from a number of leases;
  - the transfer of the maintenance of the Council's switchboard;
  - reduction in staff numbers from 400 employees to 196 employees; and
  - Eradication of long-term debt resulting in a benefit of nearly £300,000 to the general fund.

Direct savings such as the reduction in benefit administration costs have been reinvested in client management arrangements and priorities identified by residents such as improving the environment.

- 115** The transfer of the Council's housing stock to Greenvale Homes has also attracted resources into the area and council. This has included:
- around £43 million worth of improvements to Greenvale Homes over the next five years which will also give a significant boost to the local economy;
  - additional resources for disabled adaptations and the recruitment of specialist staff to reduce the waiting list;
  - sharing of capital receipts realised through the preserved right to buy to fund private sector work and new affordable housing units; and
  - gains through a VAT tax efficiency shelter.

The resources gained have been invested in areas which will have a direct impact on the quality of life for residents, such as reduced waiting lists and improved homes.

- 116 The Council is establishing a track record in using procurement to secure value for money. A sub-regional procurement group has been established, led by Elevate, leading to the development of partnering arrangements in line with PPC 2000<sup>9</sup> for the delivery of housing renewal initiatives. The contractor selection process balanced quality and cost considerations resulting in the appointment of a partnering contractor for a four-year term and materials were purchased through 'Valueworks'; a supply chain management initiative. The procurement group continues to meet to monitor progress and performance and to review the effectiveness of the patterning arrangement. Other partnering arrangements such as for the installation of disabled adaptations are still at the formative stage and are unlikely to be active for some time. Partnering has shown to be an efficient and effective means of completing works to a high standard.
- 117 Capital programmes are well managed, being completed on schedule and to budget. Elevate has praised Rossendale for their efficient spend of capital allocations and have awarded them further funding in recognition of this. Rossendale have a good relationship with their partnering contractor and have prepared several schemes to be 'ready to go' should further funding become available. The efficient spending of capital allocations gives confidence to funders that Rossendale will complete schemes on schedule and in an agreed manner.
- 118 Little use has been made of planning law to secure affordable housing. Section 106 agreements and commuted sums have only recently been used to secure any affordable housing. The Council has only recently adopted a formula for affordable housing on new sites and an agreement for three units has been reached. Such a late start in using section 106 agreements means the Council will have missed opportunities to develop affordable housing.
- 119 The Council has not made any assessment of the balance between the cost and the quality of strategic housing services. Comparative spend on homelessness services shows a mixed performance, for the period 2005/06 Rossendale shows itself to be in the bottom quarter for spend on homelessness per head, a change from 2003/03 when it was in the middle quartile. However, officers are unsure as to the reasons for this. While costs of the overall homelessness and housing advice service are known, through the agency fee paid to Greenvale Homes, more detailed costs such as costs per case are not known. Furthermore, no analysis has been made around the cost and quality of the temporary accommodation provided. The Council has not benchmarked the costs of its provision with other authorities to evaluate whether or not it could realistically reduce the cost of the service. Without this information the Council are unsure if they are spending their money in an effective manner.

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<sup>9</sup> PPC2000 is the first standard form of Project Partnering Contract and was launched in September 2000 by Sir John Egan, Chairman of the Construction Task Force.

**120** A series of small money saving initiatives have been introduced. As well as saving money the initiatives have also met other Council and central government initiatives. This has included:

- a rent bond scheme to encourage private landlords to take tenants they have been previously reluctant to accept. This has resulted in significant savings being made through a reduction in spend on temporary accommodation;
- an equity release loan scheme for owner occupiers has replaced improvement grants. The loan scheme can generate greater funds and assist more people; and
- benefit take up campaigns are conducted on a regular basis. The campaigns are co-ordinated with other agencies and aimed at groups with traditionally low take up rates such as the over 60s and housing benefit amongst privately rented tenants.

However, there has been no analysis of the effectiveness of the initiatives, leaving the Council unsure of their effectiveness and unaware of where to direct further initiatives and improve take up.

## Summary

**121** The strategic housing services in Rossendale provides a fair level of service.

**122** There is a clear and well researched housing strategy. It is generally easy to access services and customers' opinions of the service are gathered and acted upon. Services have been shaped around service users preferences. The disabled adaptations service responds well to urgent requests for adaptations and generally the service is improving. Performance indicators show a decreasing number of homelessness and repeat homelessness presentations are falling. Services for the homeless are developing and co-operation between different agencies is improving. A number of services for those living in the private sector, such as equity release loans and rent guarantee bonds, have been developed. At a corporate level there is an emphasis on value for money and making savings.

**123** There are a number of weaknesses. Identified need for affordable housing cannot be met. The waiting time for disabled adaptations is excessive and while waiting applicants are not kept informed of the progress of their applications. The Council are unaware of what sections of the community are accessing services. There is no provision for emergency accommodation for homelessness cases in the borough and generally there has only recently been an emphasis on improving the homelessness service. Public service agreement seven will not be achieved and new services for those living in the private sector have not been effectively advertised, leading to low take up. There has been less emphasis on value for money within strategic housing services when compared to the Council as a whole.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

### What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 124** There are a number of drivers and barriers to improvements in strategic housing services. The housing stock and other associated services have been voluntarily transferred to a new landlord: Greenvale Homes. Access to services have been improved with the creation of a well used one-stop-shop. Additionally, e-services have also been improved with an effective website. Performance over a number of key performance indicators show a generally upward trend. However, further improvements are required in the disabled facilities service which has extensive waiting lists and the provision of affordable housing needs to be improved to meet growing demand. The approach to homelessness is developing with little impact yet recorded from a series of initiatives, and a limited response to the need move on and temporary accommodation in the borough.
- 125** The Council is making progress against a poor CPA (Comprehensive Performance Assessment) in 2003. The Council is presently under intervention by DCLG and are monitored closely. As part of the intervention the Council are subject to annual assessment which shows progress against previously identified weaknesses. The Council has made an application for a new corporate assessment to the regional panel which has been arranged for April 2007.
- 126** Rossendale have agreed a detailed Corporate Improvement Plan and Best Value Performance Plan for the period 2006 to 2009. The plan is SMART and shows an awareness of the needs and aspirations of the borough. Objectives are listed in the plan which show grounding in issues which are important to people such as: 'the improvement in provision of affordable homes in the borough to ensure an accessible housing market.' Researching needs and basing plans around that need will lead to outcomes which are important to the borough's residents.
- 127** Service specific plans are similarly detailed and aimed at improvements which will be noticed by service users. A strategic housing improvement action plan has been agreed and most high priority actions have been completed to some extent. This includes the printing of an informative suite of new leaflets and using section 106 agreements to develop affordable housing. However, some such as publicity about empty properties could be developed further and other important issues such as an effective appeals process against homelessness decisions have only recently been resolved.
- 128** Improvements in services have led to significant increase in customer satisfaction. A 2005 survey of resident's satisfaction with the Council showed that satisfaction rates had rise from only 27 per cent in 2003 to 61 per cent in 2006. This is an impressive rise and shows that improvements have been noticed by residents.



- 129** Key performance indicators show a generally improving trend. Increasing numbers of empty properties are either demolished or brought back into use. Both the number of people presenting as homeless and repeat homeless presentations are falling. The use of bed and breakfast is used only in emergencies and within the borough. The figures show that people are less reliant on services of last resort.
- 130** There have been some significant achievements in service development:
- access to funds for new build housing has been secured. With the support of the Council 20 affordable rent flats are to be built by Greenvale Homes with a Housing Corporation grant of £670,000;
  - housing renewal improvements as part of the Elevate housing market renewal area;
  - contracting out of benefit services leading to processing times being halved;
  - a new one-stop-shop opened; and
  - Neighbourhood Environmental Action Teams introduced to improve street environment.
- 131** The pace of improvements has not been consistent and some services are still performing at an unacceptably low standard. Waiting lists for Disabled Facilities Grants are long, three are outstanding from summer 2005, and there is no emergency provision for homeless families in the borough. Similarly, targets in several areas such as the provision of affordable housing will not be reached and other targets such as reducing the number of long-term empty properties are modest.
- 132** The entire housing stock was transferred to a newly created RSL, Greenvale Homes, in March of this year. Over time the transfer will grant Greenvale access £40 million in investment funds to improve the housing stock and £3.15 million for new affordable housing. The transfer was well planned and had the overwhelming support of its tenants. Greenvale has since become a subsidiary of the Pennine Housing 2000 group, resulting in reduced administration costs and access specialist expertise within the group.
- 133** Partnership working is a strength. A formal assessment of the local strategic partnership by GONW showed an improvement to Green (Amber/Green last year), reflecting the quality of the partnership. Examples of partnership working include 'Elevate' funding of £4 million for housing regeneration in Bacup, Stacksteads and Britannia resulting in visible improvements to housing in the areas. Working in partnership with other agencies maximises the impact of available resources.

- 134 Good use is made of other agencies and support groups to improve services. For example the 'M3' project on youth homelessness was an output of the Rossendale Youth Housing and Support Group and has provided temporary accommodation and support for homeless young people in the area. Other changes have been made to the one-stop-shop as a result of customer input through the equalities consultation group. Working with other agencies increases capacity and provides more effective services.

### **How well does the service manage performance?**

- 135 The strategic housing service has a series of aims and priorities with a service planning framework to deliver them. There is a strong commitment to continuous improvement shown by strategic leadership and a growing capacity to deliver service improvements which will be noticed by service users. Most, but not all weaknesses are being addressed through effective action plans and performance management systems are sophisticated. Progress is hampered by some modest target setting and important issues around the delivery of affordable housing, emergency accommodation for homeless families and disable facilities grants have yet to be addressed.
- 136 Ambitious targets have been set in the corporate improvement plan: 'eight by eight by 2008'. By 2008 Rossendale want 8 out of 10 customers satisfied with its services and for 8 out of 10 of its corporate priority indicators to meet local targets or demonstrate above average performance by 2008. The Council also has eight strategic objectives, one of which relates directly to housing:

*'Creating affordable housing and improving the general quality of social housing and owner-occupied homes.'*

Stretching targets fosters a culture of improvement.

- 137 Performance and improvement planning encompasses most aspects of the Council's and employees work. The Council has an effective corporate improvement plan which is underpinned by service team action plans and an employee appraisal process. The work of frontline employees and the overall objectives of the Council are linked; employees are aware of their role in the 'bigger picture'. Improvement work is monitored by monthly BVPI data reports to the senior management team and portfolio holders, supplemented by quarterly performance reports to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. There is evidence of councillors challenging performance in for example, council tax collection rates and levels of sickness, which has led to improvements. This is an effective way to manage performance and plan improvements.
- 138 The Council has a record of implementing its corporate plans, including those which relate to internal improvements. For example, the majority of the action plan relating to the 2005 staff survey have been implemented and the Council is on track with its preparation for assessment for the Investors In People award. This demonstrates that Rossendale is capable of effectively implementing its own plans, which suggests that service improvement plans can also be delivered effectively.



- 139** Improvement planning at a service level has been less effective. For example, there are currently two action plans in place for the homelessness service which are not effectively co-ordinated. One plan was produced following the development of the current homelessness strategy and the other in response to a review of the service against the Audit Commission's key lines of enquiry. The two are not linked and so progress is more difficult to track as are decisions about which actions should take priority. This can lead to inappropriate allocation of resources.
- 140** Improving outcomes for all service users are not fully addressed by plans and strategies across strategic housing services. For example, there are no SMART action plans to address the poor condition of temporary accommodation, address the slow completion of DFGs in the district and service standards are not in place for all services. This means that poorer outcomes will continue to be provided to service users.
- 141** The Council is aware of some weaknesses in its services. It is aware of weaknesses through communications with its residents, previous reports and an understanding of best practice elsewhere. It has invested resources to address gaps in capacity such as improving customer care through a new one-stop-shop and customer care standards as part of a sustained drive to improve community engagement. However, some significant and difficult to resolve weaknesses remain such as the high proportion of empty properties in the borough, the lack of affordable housing and extensive waiting lists for DFGs. All aspects of the Council's performance have to be addressed for comprehensive improvements.
- 142** Performance management systems have been improved but are not comprehensive. A web-based performance management system; 'Covalent' has been introduced. This has led to better quality and timely management information, alerting management to poor performance quicker than under previous systems. The system can be accessed from any computer and shows 'at a glance' through a traffic light system if performance is on or off target. However, not all aspects of performance are reported on, for example, there is no reporting on the disabled adaptations service and little reporting of satisfaction levels on individual services. A comprehensive approach to reporting performance management will lead to 'across the board' improvements.

- 143 Systems of varying effectiveness have been set up to monitor the services delivered on behalf of the Council. A series of service level agreements to govern the level of services in such areas as homelessness and benefits have been agreed. Additionally, for example, the Housing Benefit service is closely monitored across a range of indicators and supplemented by a series of formal monthly meetings. However, there are a number of weaknesses:
- qualitative judgements on services are not comprehensively gathered;
  - there is no means of recording if an applicants is vulnerable and needs home visits;
  - training of staff is not recorded or if they received training in related areas of their work and be in a position to generally advise service users; and
  - records of homelessness decisions awaited was not complete or up-to-date.
- 144 Target setting is variable, some are modest and others are unachievable. Targets to reduce the number of empty homes are modest and do not reflect nuisance properties which have been empty for more than six months. Targets for new affordable homes are lower than that estimated as required from the housing needs assessment and cannot be reached because of planning limitations. Inappropriate targets can lead to under-performance and demoralise staff.
- 145 Progress towards the decent homes targets is mixed. The Council are confident that all tenants living in Greenvale property will live in decent homes by 2010. However, progress to PSA 7 (70 per cent of vulnerable people living in decent homes in the private sector) is less assured and the Council are not confident of reaching the target. This is due to a number of factors including such things as the move from grant aided works to works funded from equity release loans and the high proportion of old and deteriorating stock in the area. This will leave vulnerable people living in none decent homes.
- 146 Budgets and risk are effectively managed. Capital projects for Elevate have been delivered on time and allocations spent, attracting further Elevate funding. Since the transfer of the housing stock the Council has become debt free and a housing revenue account of £1 million has been set up. There is a risk management strategy which details risk and contingencies should the risk become a reality. Effective budget and risk management guarantees services to vulnerable people.

### **Does the service have the capacity to improve?**

- 147 The Council has adopted a modern approach to service delivery and driven through substantial changes to its core infrastructure facilitated by strong political and officer leadership. Improvements to corporate capacity are now showing through in better services and much improved user satisfaction. Over the past three years significant improvements have been delivered in financial management, human resources and ICT. Partnerships are more productive, investments have been made in training and development and sickness levels have reduced.

- 148** Rossendale have placed an emphasis on improving the strategic housing and enabling role. An additional section and post has been created: 'Housing Market Renewal and Strategy Unit' and a Housing Research and Strategy Officer has been appointed. The unit is responsible for the strategic development of the housing market renewal pathfinder work within the area development framework. The unit is also responsible for the strategic analysis and management of housing needs within the borough as well as the delivery and monitoring of the Housing Strategy. This demonstrates a clear commitment to fulfilling the Council's strategic housing role.
- 149** A medium-term financial strategy has been agreed which GONW describes as 'sound'. The strategy covers the period up to 2008/09. The strategy provides the framework for financial planning for the Council over the next three years and efficiency savings to be made as part of the Gershon review.
- 150** The Council works in partnership with neighbouring authorities and agencies to develop projects and share good practice to improve services for customers. For example, a 12-month project (now over) with Shelter providing three specialist homelessness workers was the result of joint working and funding with both Burnley and Pendle Councils. The Council has also jointly funded research into the housing needs of travellers. Joint working can be an effective way of smaller organisations securing necessary specialist services.
- 151** Partner agencies and service users are being consulted as part of the current review of the homelessness strategy. Rossendale with Greenvale Homes recently launched the review with an event which involved a range of agencies considering issues such as domestic violence, young people and homelessness and the re-housing of offenders. It is planned to complete the strategy review by the end of March 2007. Involving partners and service users means that the future strategy is more likely to address real needs and be realistic in what it sets out to achieve.
- 152** There is evidence of effective human resource planning and management at Rossendale. A new and more robust corporate sickness/absence management policy has been agreed and implemented. This has contributed to (but is not wholly responsible for) falling levels of absence. The sickness/absence procedure has key trigger points for action and regular reports are provided to senior management and members. The authority is currently on target to reach a corporate average of 10 days sickness per employee for the year compared with 13.5 days in 2005/06. Lower absence levels gives the Council greater capacity to provide services in line with its plans.

- 153** Rossendale Council are investing in the capacity of staff and members. For example:
- draft reward and retention strategy is to be considered by the Council in the new year;
  - increasing amounts spent on training of staff and members. The Training Budget for 2006/7 is £107,000, almost 1 per cent of the total Council budget, an increase per head from £344 in 2005/06 to £382 in 2006/7. This compares well against an average local government spend of £216 per employee;
  - personal development plans for almost all Council members;
  - market supplements to enable Rossendale to attract and retain suitably skilled and competent staff; and
  - home working for staff whose role permits this.
- This is having a positive effect on staff. Staff satisfaction levels are regularly reviewed and at the last survey 41.7 per cent felt the Council is a good organisation to work for, an increase from 25.6 per cent in 2004/05. Staff turnover is falling from the high level of over 20 per cent to be broadly in line with national averages at around 14 per cent. A motivated workforce is willing to accept change and strives for better services.
- 154** Rossendale has an effective staff appraisal process in place. Staff have annual appraisals at which performance and future objectives are discussed. The Human Resources team oversees the process to ensure that appraisals are carried out and that staff training needs are identified and collated through the process. Having clear and effective staff appraisal processes helps to ensure that staff are clear about their objectives and that these are linked to achievement of the organisation's objectives.
- 155** Staff within the private sector team are suitably skilled to deliver the service. Staff we met had access to and had attended training to ensure that they were kept up-to-date with legislation and positive practice. For example, officers have attended training on the implications of the Housing Act 2004 including the Housing Health and Safety Rating system. Staff are therefore appropriately skilled to deliver services in the private sector.
- 156** The effectiveness of some staff training is in doubt. Although mandatory diversity training has been provided for all Council staff, none could recall much about the training nor could they clearly identify how it has affected the way they provide services. This raises questions about the effectiveness of the training and about how effectively the impact of the training has been evaluated.
- 157** Member capacity has been developed. Considerable investment has been made in member development, much of it through the IDeA, using DCLG capacity-building monies. The Council has adopted a Leader/Cabinet structure and over 90 per cent of members have personal development plans. The plans clearly signal the Council's intent to improve governance and services.

- 158** The Council is making appropriate investment in IT systems and training to enable staff to make effective use of IT. Improvements have included new financial and budgeting systems and the development of geographical information systems. Effective use of IT can help to streamline work processes and speed up data recording, collection and analysis, which in turn helps staff to manage the service. The 'Covalent' performance management system is a further example of improved use of IT to assist in managing improvement.

## Summary

- 159** Prospects for the improvement of strategic housing services in Rossendale are good.
- 160** The Council has placed an emphasis on improving services. The needs and aspirations of most residents have been researched and services shaped to reflect this. The housing stock has been transferred to a new landlord and tenants can expect a series of improvements in their homes. There is generally effective service planning and systems are in place to monitor performance. Key performance indicators are generally showing an improving trend and there has been dramatic improvements in customer satisfaction. The performance of staff is regularly appraised and most councillors have personal development plans. Capacity has been increased by regular training and improved IT facilities.
- 161** The pace of improvements has not been consistent across all services. Some services show poor performance and there is unmet need for affordable housing. Some targets are modest and others presently unachievable. The quality of service improvement planning is inconsistent and the monitoring of services delivered on behalf of the Council needs strengthening.

## Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

### Best value performance indicators

| Performance indicator   | All England top quartile 2003/04 | Rossendale 2003/04 | Rossendale 2004/05 | Rossendale 2005/06 |
|---|----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| BVPI 62<br>Proportion of unfit homes made fit or demolished   | 4.69                             | 1.44               | 2.53               | 3.50               |
| BVPI 64<br>Vacant private homes returned to use or demolished | 56.25                            | 13                 | 7                  | 9                  |
| BVPI 183a<br>Average length of stay in B&B                    | 1                                | 5.40               | 8.0                | 3.14               |
| BVPI 183b<br>Average length of stay in hostels                | 0                                | 50.40              | 39                 | 34                 |

Source: BVPIs

## Appendix 2 – Reality checks undertaken

- 1 When we went on-site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. Our reality checks included:
  - visits to supported housing schemes;
  - visits to development sites;
  - visits to temporary accommodation for homeless households;
  - visits to partner agencies; and
  - file checks.